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AI: Israel committed war crimes

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Amnesty International has said that there is evidence that Israel's attacks on civilian infrastructure during the recent war in Lebanon constitute war crimes.

The London-based organisation said that the unlawful destruction of homes, bridges and roads as well as water and fuel storage plants, was a key part of Israel's strategy in Lebanon, in a report issued on Wednesday morning.

"Israel's assertion that the attacks on the infrastructure were lawful is manifestly wrong. Many of the violations identified in our report are war crimes, including indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks," Kate Gilmore, executive deputy secretary-general of Amnesty International (AI), said.

"The evidence strongly suggests that the extensive destruction of power and water plants, as well as the transport infrastructure vital for food and other humanitarian relief, was deliberate and an integral part of a military strategy," Gilmore said in a press release.

Around 1,200 Lebanese are believed to have died in the war.

The Israeli government argues that they were targeting Hezbollah positions, individuals and support facilities and that other damage done to civilian infrastructure was a result of Hezbollah using the civilian population as a "human shield".

Israeli response

"Israel's actions in Lebanon were in accordance with recognised norms of behaviour during conflicts and with relevant international law," said Mark Regev, a spokesman at Israel's foreign ministry.

"Unlike Hezbollah, we did not deliberately target the Lebanese civilian population. On the contrary, under very difficult circumstances, we tried to be as surgical as is humanly possible in targeting the Hezbollah terrorist organisation."



Israel says it did not deliberately target Lebanese civilians

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Regev said that Lebanese infrastructure was "targeted only when that infrastructure was being exploited by the Hezbollah machine, and this is in accordance with the rules of war".

On its website the Israeli military provides video and photographs showing Hezbollah firing rockets from civilian areas.

Foreign journalists based in Lebanon also reported that the Shia militia chose to fight from civilian areas and had on occasion prevented Lebanese civilians from fleeing conflict-hit areas of south Lebanon.

Al-Manar, Hezbollah's satellite channel, also showed footage of Hezbollah firing rockets from civilian areas and produced animated graphics showing how Hezbollah fired rockets at Israeli cities from inside villages in southern Lebanon.

However, AI argues that the volume of damage to Lebanese civil buildings suggests that Israel was not just trying to target Hezbollah fighters.

"The pattern, scope and scale of the attacks makes Israel's claim that this was 'collateral damage', simply not credible," said Gilmore.

War crimes

AI has called on the UN to hold a "comprehensive, independent and impartial inquiry" into violations of international humanitarian law during the conflict.

AI also said that the UN should hold individuals responsible for crimes committed during the war and ensure that "full reparation" is provided to the victims.

The Israeli government has said that it will itself hold Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, responsible for the war and that it will kill him if it can.

During the four week war Hezbollah fired 3,900 rockets at Israeli towns and cities with the aim of inflicting maximum civilian casualties.

The Israeli government says that 44 Israeli civilians were killed in the bombardments and 1,400 wounded.

AI has not issued a report accusing Hezbollah of war crimes.

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